

EcoqO

Food

Slowly does it – the sustainable way

A month cruising Italy on an old-style bicycle may not be a typical university experience but for former Sydneysider David Prior, it's par for the course, writes **Sue White**.

As the first Australian student of Italy's University of Gastronomic Studies, David Prior recently travelled with 150 peers from 30 countries, to "learn about the environment, sustainability and what's happening to the Po River".

The hands-on approach is part of a unique university experience, with protection of the biodiversity high among its aims. The university, based in Pollenzo in the north-west, was developed by the Slow Food Movement and is funded by the Italian government and food producers from around the world.

It is an investment the founders are confident will pay off throughout the food chain in years to come. "The university is hoping my peers will be leaders in the food industry, and will take into account more sustainable practices," says Prior.

To learn from the best, students travel three or four months of the year to some of the most famous food and wine regions in the world. Although it sounds exotic, Prior says his four-year degree is not all truffles and olive oil. "We study animal husbandry, botany, chemistry, all the stuff you need a real interest in food to keep up with."

Before moving to Italy, Prior was working in and around food in Sydney. A stint as a stylist's assistant was a particularly fast life. "It was com-

CAREER

▶ DAVID PRIOR

▶ Ages 24

▶ **Positions:** First Australian studying at University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo, Italy. Stylist and styling assistant to Megan Morton, Kristen Anderson and Sue Fairlie-Cunninghame.

▶ **Career path:** Assistant to guest chefs in the cooking school Accoutrement; worked

on photo shoots for *Vogue Entertaining And Travel*, *Australian Gourmet Traveller*, *Delicious*, *Inside Out* and various cookbooks. Encouraged by his mentors to pursue scholarship in Italy and learn more about food.

▶ **Green vision:** A situation where a choice of high quality, diverse and sustainably-produced food is within the reach of everyone.

pletely crazy. I was at the mercy of everyone, all the time, because I was the lowliest person."

Encouraged by mentors here, Prior applied for admission to the course to push himself a little. Studying about food and food systems in Italian is "tough, but I'm getting there". Given that he spoke no Italian on his arrival 18 months ago, he has found it a humbling experience.

Much of the learning is hands-on and straight from world experts. Some, such as Alice Waters of the US, or the Irish chef Darina Allen, are internationally known, but Prior finds the lesser-known tutors equally interesting. "I am inspired by people

who take the time and care about what they do, like the cheese producers up in the mountains, normal people who show you exactly how they work."

The dedication to food quality is seen all over Italy, and it's a passion that movements like slow food are hoping to inspire in people of all ages. As a student delegate at last November's International Slow Food Congress in Mexico, Prior and a group of students from Yale, Stanford and Oxford universities formed an alliance to get youth more heavily involved in sustainable food production.

With the support of Waters and the Slow Food president, Carlo Petrini, the students aim to send a large

delegation of young foodies to international Terre Madre competition in Italy in October.

"Young farmers often are isolated with no opportunity to travel, knowledge is being lost," Prior says. "We want to create a global network of students and young producers so they can share knowledge from their community to community."

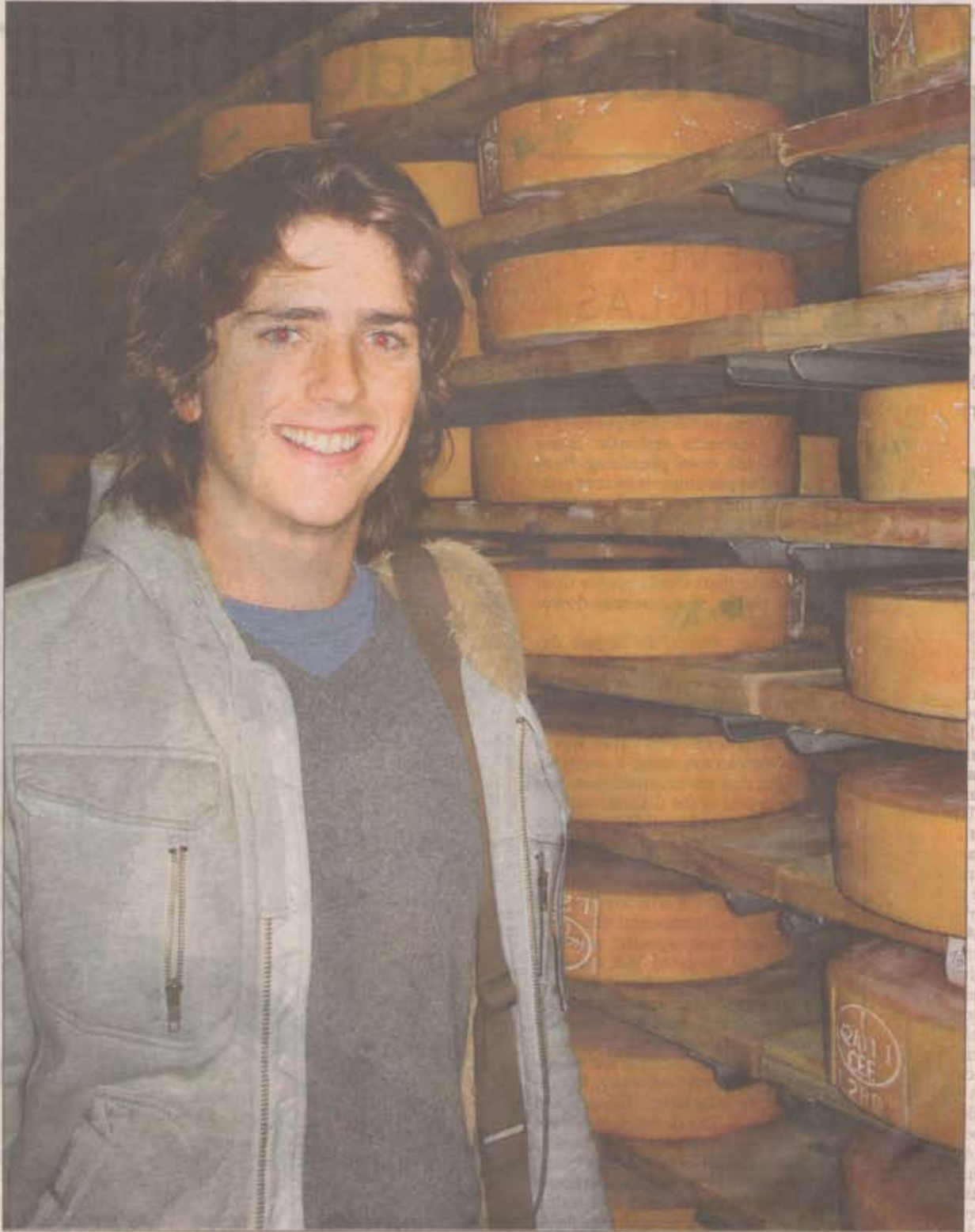
Prior hopes the Australian delegation will range from "farmers, seed savers, chefs and activists". They might also get a personal taste of the expense of the global sustainable food movement.

While his own learning environment is densely packed with food (last year Spain and Ireland, this year the US and Japan), he says the pace of existence itself is quite slow.

"I live as an Italian in a small town and shop at the markets three times a week. I cook very simply and understand where my food comes from and who produces it. The other students and I cook for one another most nights."

It is a lifestyle he aspires to maintain once his degree is complete. He moves into a career in food – perhaps as a *provadore*, or a freelancer, sulting on where to find quality produce, perhaps in a big city.

"It doesn't mean you can't live this in the city. I'm not ashamed to be a city person, there's just a disconnect between food and the consumer in



Say Trentino ... David Prior is studying in Italy and loving it.